

# FEARLESS

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Standing firm when the  
going gets tough

Jonty Allcock



**Fearless:** standing firm when the going gets tough

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# Introduction

This is the true story of one man who held his nerve and stood firm.

He faced powerful temptations, vicious enemies, formidable kings and ravenous lions. Yet for seventy years he stood his ground.

How did he do it? He wasn't a superhero. It wasn't because he had great willpower or showed extreme bravery.

It's because he knew God.

His name was Daniel—and he was totally convinced that God is the only King worth living for.

Do you know God like that?

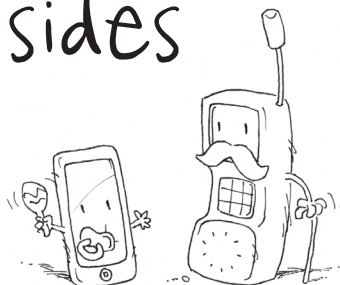
That's what this book is all about. We're going to meet the God who makes life worth living. We're going to learn about Jesus, who came so that we can know God personally.

It's only knowing God that will make us courageous. It's only knowing God that will enable us to say "no" to temptation. It's only knowing God that will last for ever.

Are you ready to meet him?



# Chapter One: Changing sides



*But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine.*

*Daniel 1 v 8*

Please read Daniel chapter 1

Sometimes I feel sorry for my phone. The truth is I'm not very loyal, so I'm constantly looking around for something better. I hate being locked into a contract for two years—I want the freedom to change team; to shop around; to upgrade. My loyalty only lasts for as long as it suits me.

So I feel sorry for my phone.

But supposing this changing-phone mentality spilled over into other areas of life. My friendships? My family? The way I treat God? Supposing I only stayed loyal for as long as it suited me; always waiting for a better offer.

Makes you wonder.

Where does the loyalty of our hearts really lie? That's the searching question that confronts us as we dig into this book of Daniel.

There are basically two options. **There are two kingdoms and we all belong to one or the other.** We're either loyal citizens of the *kingdom of God* or we're loyal subjects of the *kingdom of the world*.

## The kingdom of God

If we're going to understand the book of Daniel, we have to get our heads round these two kingdoms. The story of our world is a story of these two kingdoms.

It all starts with a very powerful King. His name is God and he created all things. He spoke and it all came into being: the sun, the moon, the stars and planet earth.

And God had a great plan for the earth. It wasn't just another planet floating in space—God created earth to be his kingdom. It was a beautiful place, where people lived and God ruled as King. With God as King, it was safe; with God as King, there were good things to enjoy.

**Security. Satisfaction. Sorted.** That's the *kingdom of God*.

This is crucial. Do you see where the *kingdom of God* is located? Not in some heavenly place far, far away—it's on earth. That was always the plan for the *kingdom of God*.

## The kingdom of the world

But then another kingdom appeared. Human beings rejected God as King and established a new kingdom on earth—a rival kingdom—the *kingdom of the world*. God's good word is ignored and human beings rule. (Read all about it in Genesis 3.) People always think that getting rid of God will bring freedom but instead it has brought death and disaster.

**Fighting. Frustration. Fear.** That's the *kingdom of the world*.

Two kingdoms. And they are at war.

Throughout history God has been at work to establish his great kingdom on earth. He has a very great plan. That's the great story of



the Bible—from Abraham to Israel to David to Jesus—it's the story of the *kingdom of God*.

But at exactly the same time, people have been scrabbling around trying to establish the rival *kingdom of the world*. The war rages.

And so this book of Daniel challenges us. Where does our loyalty lie? What about when things get tough? Will we change sides? How do we even decide?

We live in the middle of this great battle. **Will we invest our lives in the *kingdom of God* or the *kingdom of the world*?** What are we living for?

We're going to see some pretty stunning truths about the *kingdom of God*—and expose some harsh realities about the *kingdom of the world*.

Let's get into the story.

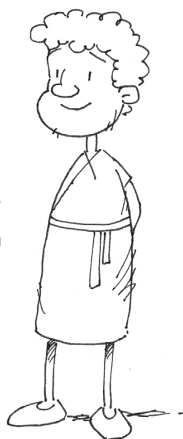
### Time to change sides?

Daniel was a man who got caught up in the crossfire of this war of kingdoms. He grew up in a place called Jerusalem. It was the capital city of God's kingdom on earth. God's temple was there—it was the place where God lived with his people. Daniel was well and truly on the side of God's kingdom.

"Great," you might think.

But then something happened that changed everything. It shook the very foundations of Daniel's world. Here's how the Bible describes it:

*In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.*  
*Daniel 1 v 1*



Jerusalem is surrounded; the *kingdom of the world* is attacking. Surely God will step in and rescue. You know how it works: just when all seems lost, the great superhero swoops in and saves the day.

### **Except God doesn't.**

The enemy comes crashing in. They smash stuff up, carry off prisoners and destroy the temple. The *kingdom of the world* seems to defeat the *kingdom of God*.

So young Daniel finds himself living in Babylon—a strange place with other gods, a new language and culture, and far from home. It would be tempting at that point for Daniel to change sides. God has let him down—he needs an upgrade.

Can you imagine the pressure? Here's the first big challenge to Daniel's loyalty.



## **God looks weak**

God seems to have been spectacularly defeated. **Has God fallen asleep? Has God gone on vacation?** Where has he gone?

Don't you sometimes feel like that? There are times when we look around us and think that God seems weak. It looks as if God is losing. It seems that the *kingdom of God* is a foolish place in which to invest our lives; the *kingdom of the world* looks a much better place to be.

Perhaps things seem to be going wrong and we ask: "Where have you gone, God?"

We can find our loyalty wavering. But Daniel stands firm. He could see that things were not quite the way they appeared.

## See the reality

When Jerusalem was attacked, something bigger was going on. Something that's going to shock you. Here's what the Bible says.

*And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his [Nebuchadnezzar's] hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia and put in the treasure-house of his god.*

*Daniel 1 v 2*

Why did Babylon defeat Jerusalem? Because God did it. God was not being weak; God was absolutely in control. That's a surprise. Why would God do that?

The people living in Jerusalem were supposed to be the *kingdom of God* on earth. God had rescued them and taken care of them and provided for them. And in return they had run off to find other gods. They were disloyal. **They didn't want God—they wanted an upgrade.**

So God was rightly punishing them. He wasn't weak—he was carrying out his plan. He was establishing the *kingdom of God* on earth, and was punishing those who would be disloyal.

Daniel can see that. And so he doesn't abandon God as a weakling. He remains loyal to God even when things are tough.

So here's the challenge for us. Don't give up on the *kingdom of God* just because it looks weak. God is totally in control and is working out his plan.

## Strong weakness

Let me take you to another time when it looked as if the *kingdom of the world* had defeated the *kingdom of God*.

A man is dying on a wooden cross. He's covered in blood; he's crying out. His name is Jesus, and he was supposed to be the Son of God. But just look at him now—he looks so weak. God looks weak. It's the *kingdom of the world* that looks strong.

But look harder; look beyond the surface. Actually, what God is doing through the death of Jesus on the cross is his amazing plan. It's through the death of Jesus that the *kingdom of God* is established on earth. Through the blood and the pain, God will rescue millions of people and bring them into his kingdom.

Can you see it? Daniel could see what God was doing and so he stayed loyal. We have to see beyond the mess of this world to the God who is working out his plans. He will establish his kingdom.

But then comes the second massive challenge to Daniel's loyalty.

## Babylon looks good

Daniel has got a lot going for him. Don't believe me? Check this out (although I warn you—it's the kind of description that might make you sick).

*Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility—young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians.*

*Daniel 1 v 3-4*

Daniel has to be happy with that as a summary: "no physical defect". I mean, come on, that's just not fair! But anyway, back to the story.

Daniel gets on with life in Babylon. He begins to learn the language and the culture. His name is changed to be more Babylonian. He doesn't kick up a fuss; he gets on with it. But then we're told this:

*The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table.*  
*Daniel 1 v 5*

Hey, hey, things are looking up. Maybe Babylon is not going to be so bad after all. This is going to be fun. Let's dig in.

But Daniel makes an extraordinary decision.

*But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself in this way.*  
*Daniel 1 v 8*

He'll learn the language; he'll take a new name; but he'll not eat the food. Instead he chooses to have just vegetables and water. What's that about?

Surely Daniel should be able to enjoy some of the perks of life in Babylon? But Daniel draws the line. He can see that eating this food would defile him—it would be wrong in God's eyes.

Maybe the food has been offered to other gods. We don't know. Or maybe Daniel can feel a more subtle danger. A little voice that perhaps goes something like this...

*"Here is a king who can provide me with great food and wine. God has let me down. He didn't rescue me and provide for me. Why shouldn't I enjoy this stuff? At least in the kingdom of the world I can have some fun."*

Do you see the danger? Maybe Daniel can feel Babylon pulling on his heart and he's fighting to stay loyal to God. He doesn't want to be defiled.



He takes a stand and refuses the king's food. That was a risky move—it's pretty offensive to refuse to eat someone's food—but Daniel knows where his loyalty lies. **Not with the King of Babylon, however tasty the meatballs.**

## Wise choice

Daniel's loyalty is proved right. God takes care of Daniel and, after ten days of vegetables, he's stronger than any of the others. God gives Daniel wisdom, too.

Loyalty to God was tough, but it was proved right. When Daniel felt his heart being tugged away from God, he immediately slammed the door. He said "no". He knew where to draw the line.

I wonder if we know where to draw the line?

Being a Christian doesn't mean having nothing to do with the world.

**We're not supposed to live in a wardrobe and ignore everyone else.** There's a lot that's good; things we can enjoy. We can learn and join in the culture around us: music, poetry, science and so on.

But some of us are very bad at drawing the line. We never really learn to say "no" to anything. We're drawn away from God by all the exciting sparkly things around us. We end up defiled. We change kingdoms.

That was my experience when I left home for the first time. I didn't know where the line was. I said "yes" to things that should have been a "no". My heart was drawn away. I wanted to upgrade my life. I wanted things to be a bit more exciting. I ended up distant from God. Then I realised what Daniel knew all along.



Loyalty to God is key. He's the King who made us. He's the King who is in control. He's the King who is building his kingdom. To turn our back on that is madness.

So which kingdom will you invest your life in? Are there lines that you need to draw? Are there things you need to say "no" to? You won't regret it. Daniel certainly didn't.